

Joshua Lederberg, President
Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, New York



December 10, 1978

Dear Josh,

As usual, I'm writing to request another letter of recommendation, this time for a faculty position at Mount Holyoke. The enclosure describes the requirements; it looks to me as though one of the possible combinations is unusually well-matched to my qualifications. Since they wrote to ask for my letters, reprints and further information, it appears that the committee may think so too.

I'm rather excited about the job, because it strikes me as one of the relatively few that would satisfy most of my criteria for a desirable academic situation. I like the idea of having reasonably small classes and having the opportunity to follow students through their academic careers, watching them (hopefully) change and develop intellectually. I like the probable quality of the students. I'm extremely interested in the Five-College Consortium, which seems like a solution to the problem of maintaining a small college without condemning each member of the faculty to languish in intellectual isolation. Finally, I'm hoping (although I haven't gotten an answer to the question yet) that because the school has been fairly well-funded in the past, the research facilities will be satisfactory.

The latter point has recently become even more important than usual, because I've had some novel ideas about the hormonal control of sexual differentiation and sexual behavior and want to see if they are as good as I think that they are. If so, they have enough ramifications to keep me busy for a long time.

During the past quarter, I haven't had time to get into the lab at all; I've been responsible for all the mechanics of the undergraduate core course in evolution and genetics, which has involved directing the labs and managing the exams and record-keeping for 500 students. I've also lectured in the course and run a weekly discussion session to answer students' questions about the lecture material: the sessions have attracted as many as 100 students at a time. It's been a good review of the material, and it's been interesting to see how Rowland Davis and Eloy Rodriguez organize their lectures. It's also been educational: I'm more certain than ever that I prefer to teach small classes (even though the applause from a very large class certainly is a pleasant noise), and I'm also certain that I don't want to cut myself off from doing research. When I got interested in my new hypothesis and started searching through the literature and writing and thinking about how to test it and what it might lead to,

↑↑ Gerling file

it was such a satisfying, exciting feeling. I'd hate to lose that satisfaction, as well as the simpler but real pleasures of working physically in the lab.

I'm also still checking out various alternatives in human genetics, including the possibility of writing a fellowship to work with Pat Jacobs, but none of these programs need letters of recommendation at present. I've come up with one good idea in cytogenetics so far, but I don't think that I can get enough human material to do it. It is reassuring, though, that recently I seem to be having some testable new thoughts about research possibilities; it makes me more confident about what I want to do.

The fellowship on aging for which you recommended me last year finally came through, but Pauline has decided that she needs to focus the lab on her primary concerns, none of which are aging, so she withdrew her commitment. Next quarter, though, I'll be working on my sexual differentiation hypothesis in Gary Lynch's lab. He's not especially interested in the topic, but he has lots of room and lots of rats and some students who know the techniques I want to use. It should be interesting.

I've also been working with the campus tutoring program, supervising about thirty undergraduates tutoring nearly two hundred students in various branches of the natural sciences. This has also involved discussions with most of the faculty for whose courses we tutor: another educational experience. I hadn't quite realized how many different approaches were possible to the teaching of undergraduates. Next quarter, however, I'll probably encounter a few more.

You've undoubtedly been sufficiently busy in the last few months to make my life look leisurely, but I imagine that it's also been exciting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laura", written in dark ink.